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ECCLESIOLOGY

THE NORTH INDIAN MISSION OF ST. THOMAS
ACCORDING TO THE ACTS OF THOMAS

Dr. James Puliurumpil

REFLECTIONS FOR - LIFE IN THE CHURCH

Fr. Johnson Vadakkumcherry

JESUS AND THE SET TIMES OF THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS

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Editorial

Lumen Gentium chapter II, paragraph 9 compares the Old and the New Israel. The former is called the Church of God and the latter the church of Christ. As Israel according to the flesh which wandered in the desert was already called the Church of God (Num. 20:4), so too, the new Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city (Heb. 13:14), is called the Church of Christ. It is Christ indeed who has purchased it with his own blood; he has filled it with his spirit; he has provided means adapted to its visible and social union. All those, who in faith, look towards Jesus the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace. God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity. Destined to extend to all regions of the earth, it enters into human history, though it transcends at once all times and all racial boundaries.

This Church is a continuation of the life of Christ. The present Catholic Church has acquired its shape having passed through various phases of history; through moments of bitter trials and wonderful triumphs due to reasons from within and without. The Church as an organism was and is guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church today with its institutional and structural advantages is trying to reinvent itself more

lively and original. The life of the Church derives from the life of the Lord; in other words, it originates from the lively Eucharistic celebration. Often the life of the Church is limited or circumscribed especially to the ceremonial-liturgical moments inside the church building. Dr. Johnson Vadakumchery in '*Reflections for Life in the Church*' gives his insights on the Church. What should be the life in the Church? What sort of life it should be? How to make the faithful more alive and active? This is the intention of the author in writing this article.

We often hear the question: Is Church an organized society or a spiritual communion? He gives the answer too. The Church is in its inner core a community (*Gemeinschaft*); in its outer core, however, it is a society (*Gesellschaft*). The society is an outward expression of the inner community. The community is the real Church as contrasted with the phenomenal church. The inner fellowship of men with God enables them for the outer expression of fellowship with one another in Christ. It is both a community and an institution of salvation.

Rev. Prof. John Moolan, in '*Jesus and the Set Times of the Liturgy of the Hours*', makes a well clear study of the Liturgy of the Hours. He bases his thesis on the ancient belief, which is biblical too, that a day is divided into eight parts – four watches of the night and four

watches of the day. The monks were expected to pray eight times a day in ancient times. The prayers connected to these times among the East Syrians are *Ramsa, Subbaa, Lelya, Qale-d-sabra, Sapra, Qutta, Eddana and Batsa sayin*. But the idea developed later was to pray seven times a day in imitation of Jewish custom of praising the seven times a day. 'Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances' (Ps. 118. 164). The importance of Jesus at these eight parts of the day indicates the presence of Jesus in the prayer system for sanctifying personal life throughout the day and night. The purpose of each set time prayer is well fitted to the life situation of Jesus and the apostles at it. The author then gives a detailed description of each set time.

The sacredness of prayer time in the New Testament depends on its relation to the life style of Jesus. Jesus as a Jew had his Jewish background in this regard. The Jews calculated the day from evening to evening and divided the whole day into eight parts. The Jewish Christians followed the same tradition in imitation of Jesus and the apostles. The spiritual impact of Christ events on the set times of the Liturgy of the hours enlightens the worshipper to feel himself one with Christ in finding peace and joy in life, relaxing oneself with the Lord in overcoming the strife and struggle of the day to work for the glory of God and the good of the people.

In the article *North Indian Mission of St. Thomas*, Dr. James Puliurumpil makes a study of the North Indian apostolate of St. Thomas basing on the *Acts of Thomas*. Acts of

Judas Thomas is one of the important sources to study the history of the mission of St. Thomas in India. It speaks about the apostle's voyage to India, his ministry, miracles, martyrdom and burial there. According to the Acts the India where Thomas first arrived was India ruled by the king Gundaphar, which is called Indo-Parthia, which in the Greek version is Upper India which corresponds to North West India before India's partition. Being an apocryphal work, the author is of the opinion that it should be studied diligently and critically taking into account its peculiar literary genre.

Though this work seems a piece of fiction, it provides us with a lot of information. This Acts though it contains fictions and fables one should accept some kind of historical nucleus in it, namely, the preaching of St. Thomas the apostle in India. The very last sentence of the Acts tells the content of this work: The acts of Judas Thomas the Apostle are completed, which he wrought in the land of the Indians, fulfilling the command of him who sent him. A thorough going through it can bring out the historical data regarding the apostle Thomas that have come down to us through centuries. From a deep study of the Acts of Thomas one can come to the conclusion that Acts which was written in between 225-250 A.D. provides us with a lot of information regarding certain persons and places. The author comes to the conclusion that unless we read the Acts in relation with the ancient geography and history of India, we will never be able to comprehend the full import of the story of Acts.



The North Indian Mission of St. Thomas according to The Acts of Thomas

Dr. James Puliurumpil

Introduction

History is a reconstruction and reconsideration of past events which are really fragments. It is the duty of the historian to connect these fragments of history which are the objects of history. An objective approach from the part of the historian is therefore necessary. This objectivity should also not be eclipsed by the subjectivity of the historian. It is therefore the great task of the historian to go back into the past and study the events as they are witnesses to the same. When we study the Acts of Thomas too this *a priori* condition is to be observed by bringing it under strict scrutiny to see the historical element and the historical veracity of the same by proving that the story of the Acts is built upon historical events which really took place in a definite period of time.

Acts of Judas Thomas is one of the important sources to study the history of the mission of St. Thomas in India. Acts of Thomas speaks about the apostle's voyage to India, his ministry, miracles, martyrdom and burial there. According to the Acts the India where Thomas first arrived was India ruled by the king Gundaphar, which is called Indo-Parthia, which in the Greek version is Upper India which corresponded to North West India before India's partition. Being an apocryphal work it should be studied diligently

and critically taking into account its peculiar literary genre. It is neither pure history, nor sheer legend. It is neither a biography nor a missionary travelogue. It is a symbolic history with fictitious elements. When some historians discard it as being full of imagination and romantic descriptions some others make use of it by trying to find out the historical allusions it provides. Our outlook on this work changed drastically in recent times due to the archeological findings as a result of the discovery of coins bearing the name of King Gundaphar. We cannot therefore discard it as a myth, but study it critically to find out the historical elements which help us understand the mission of St. Thomas in India.

1. Historical nucleus of the Acts of Thomas

Though this work seems a piece of fiction, it provides us with a lot of information. Myths and legends do not spring up from nowhere. They are invented to explain the origin and development of a particular community, society or system. This Acts though it contains fictions and fables one should accept some kind of historical nucleus in it, namely, the preaching of St. Thomas the apostle in India. The very last sentence of the Acts tells the content of this work: The acts of Judas Thomas the Apostle are completed, which he wrought in the land of the Indians,

fulfilling the command of him who sent him; to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.¹ A thorough going through it can bring out the historical data regarding the apostle Thomas that have come down to us through centuries. The early Apocryphal Acts in general present before the readers beliefs and traditions of a Christian community as to how the Gospel had been proclaimed to them and how the particular apostle who first preached Gospel to them became martyr for the sake of this Gospel. The Acts of Thomas is no exception to this principle. It may be considered as a collective endeavour of a believing community to explain how the faith in Jesus had been preached to them.²

The Acts of Thomas as it is an imitation of earlier apocryphal works and wants to teach that marriage is unclean and unspiritual and altogether incompatible with Christianity and thus it exhorts Christians not to marry. The author has no interest in chronology or in geography. But when we go deep into it we find two divisions. The first contains the voyage to India and all that Thomas is said to have done in Gundaphar's kingdom. At the end, he bids farewell, a scene similar to Paul's farewell at Miletus and leaves them. The second contains all that he has done in the kingdom of Mazdai and ends with his martyrdom. These two divisions reflect the two Edessene

sources. The first source would be a *written document*, in all probability, a *letter*, which was preserved at Edessa and which gave a brief account of Thomas' voyage from Mediterranean with the merchant Habban, of his arrival in Gundaphar's Indian kingdom and capital and of his meeting with the king and his brother Abadgasses (Gad). And the second source, *the tradition about the martyrdom of the apostle*,³ which took place in Mylapore, in the kingdom of Mazdai.

The persons narrated in this work are historical persons and the places are not fabulous and fictitious. It does not mean that the events and the persons narrated in the Acts are historical in the full sense of the expression.⁴ It is historical in the sense that it was composed on a historical date and in a historical place and based its story on historical places, persons and events. It is written in Edessa in between 225-250 A.D. Four persons are here mentioned like St. Thomas, Gundaphar, Abadgasses (Gad), the successor of Gundaphar and Habban. Gundaphar and his brother Gad are kings who ruled India or some Indian provinces such as Punjab, Indus Valley etc. From the coins and inscriptions it is clear that Gundaphar (Gudnaphar) was a Parthian king who once ruled Parthian domain which included large parts of North India.⁵ It is during his reign that St. Thomas the

¹ Chediath-Karipai (eds.), *Acts of Thomas* (Malayalam) (OIRSI Kottayam, 1998) 140.

² James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India*, (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 6.

³ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 5.

⁴ H.G. Rawlinson, Early Contacts between India and Europe, in A.L. Bashan (ed.) *A Cultural History of India* (Delhi, 1994) 432.

⁵ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 1.

Apostle visited India especially the then famous cities Broach and Taxila and evangelized Indians.

In Acts we read: Apostle Thomas went by sea to King Gundaphar's Indian kingdom and preached the Gospel there and also met the king and his brother.⁶ There arises a number of questions in the mind of a reader, such as Gundaphar's Parthian kingdom contained which all regions of India, or whether is it the same as the present day India, or whether South a part of Parthia, or which part of India was evangelized by St. Thomas, first North India and then South India, or North and South together, or whether he has not come to the South etc are all questions to be solved. For all these questions a deep study can find answers in the Acts.

2. An apocryphal work

Apocryphal works are meant for private or secret reading. The word 'apocrypha' (in Greek *apochryphos*) means 'secret'. Apocryphal books are therefore, not meant for public reading like the canonical books of the Bible. Narrating historical facts is not the first concern or interest of the apocryphal books. Transmitting the religious elements or the revelation contained in the Scripture is its first interest. According to Simon Claude:

Certain apocryphal writings are very ancient and consequently reflect the traditions contemporary to the writings

and have become the New Testament. These apocryphal writings thus constitute for the historian a privileged route of access to a good number of Christian traditions, of which some are very ancient and go back even to the period of the first Christian communities.⁷

Being apocryphal does not mean that a book has nothing historical in it. Apocryphal means just that a book was not accepted as inspired and hence not worthy to be included among the canons of the Scripture. The canons of the Scripture do not say that the apocryphal acts do not contain any historical material. It is merely concerned with apostolicity and the inspirational character of a book.

Regarding apocryphal work one should take into account the following thing. Apocryphal writings have long been considered inferior literary products, which are judged by their relationship to canonical or normative writings. They have not yet really found their place as subjects of scientific study. Despite periodic interest from specialists of several disciplines they have remained, for the scholarly world as a whole, marginal, little known and unexploited by historians.⁸

There are 4 kinds or groups of apocryphal literature. The first one contains in written form the oral tradition obtaining in various places of ancient Christianity. The

⁶ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 2.

⁷ Simon Claude Minmoni, *Apocryphite, Histoire d'un concept transversal aux religions du livre*, Brepols 2002, as quoted in George Nedungatt, *Quest for Historical Thomas Apostle of India* (TPI Bangalore 2008) 84.

⁸ George Nedungatt, *Quest for Historical Thomas Apostle of India* (TPI Bangalore 2008) 83.

second group develops some scriptural data regarding Jesus, his family, or the apostles with free and even fantastic creations. A third group manipulates the canonical texts of Scripture in an attempt to legitimize heresy. And the fourth group contains later apocryphal writings reflection apologetic or dogmatic concerns of the time and place.⁹

Acts of Thomas is only one among the five major Acts of the Apostles. The other four are The Acts of Peter, Acts of Paul, Acts of John and Acts of Andrew. These five Acts, classified together by Photius and Lipsius, are the five most ancient and original of the apocryphal Acts and have already been the objective of comparative study by scholars. The Acts of Thomas is not necessarily the last chronologically; but it is the longest and the best preserved, although its original Syriac text underwent interpolations. The five Acts became the model for other Acts. In fact all the Apostles had their Acts by the sixth century.¹⁰ All the Apocryphal Acts have carefully chosen historical background. Without such groundwork of historical truth the respective authors could not have possibly believed that their readers would accept what they wanted to say.

2.1. Acts in the hands of the heretics and the Gnostics

Acts of Thomas is a collective endeavour of a believing community to explain how the faith in Jesus had been preached to them. But unfortunately this collective memory has been mutilated by the interpolations of the overzealous Gnostic groups.¹¹ The substance of this book is of great antiquity and it seems that in its original form it was held in high esteem by the heretics of the first and second centuries.¹² According to St. Augustine and Epiphane The Acts of Thomas is seen in the hands of the heretics by the writers of the fourth and fifth centuries.¹³ Augustine informs us that the Manicheans had already by this time interpolated the story of Thomas. Though the Manicheans were using it that does not mean that it had a Manichean origin. St. Ephrem too writes that the disciples of Bardaisan wrote apocryphal books to propagate their doctrines.¹⁴ Egeria in her travel diary mentions this book. She writes that the reading of it was condemned by Cyril of Alexandria attributing its composition to the Manicheans and she would have informed her writers of the presence of this Gnostic book in the holy place. The texts of Thomas which

⁹ M. G. Mara, *Apocrifi, Nuovo Dizionario patristico e di antica cristiana*, I (Milan, 2006) 401-402.

¹⁰ George Nedungatt, *Quest for Historical Thomas Apostle of India* (TPI Bangalore 2008) 91.

¹¹ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 6.

¹² This idea is proposed by M.R. Riddle in his book: A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.) *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Massachusetts, 1995) 357. Here the problem is: how could a work of the third century comes in the hand of the heretics of the first and second centuries? The answer is that there existed an early document describing the mission of St. Thomas in India. The Acts of Thomas is written basing on this early document adapting it to the motives of the heretics. See the details in James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 7.

¹³ See *Ad. Haeres.* XLVII I (PGXLI) col. 852; *Epistelo ad Idac.* (PLLIV) col. 694.

¹⁴ A.F.G. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, Commentary* (Leiden, 1962) 40.

she found in the *Martyrium* in Edessa, where the relics of apostle was kept and venerated, narrates the mission of Thomas to India and his martyrdom there. The fact that either the Acts or a part of it is kept in the holy place may be a testimonial to the fact that the Syrian Church did not consider the Acts as heretic or Gnostic. Thus when we connect it with the mention of Ephrem about the Apocryphal Acts we are forced to believe that the Acts in its original form existed even before Ephrem and that he never considered it to be heretical. But the heretics had begun to use it to their advantage and that is why Ephrem tells that the disciples of Bardaisan engaged themselves in writing Apocryphal Acts.¹⁵

3. A Syriac origin

There are also different opinions regarding the original language of this book. Majority holds the view that it was written in Syriac, but there are also writers who say that its original language was Greek. According to Klijn, it was originally composed in Syriac and was translated into Greek several times. The early Syriac version was lost and the present Syriac version is a retranslation of the Greek. The contents of the book show that the Greek version goes back to a stage of the Syriac version earlier than known from the Syriac version available in the manuscripts. Though there are some deviations in the Syriac and Greek versions they do not differ much.¹⁶ The

Syriac scholars say that the Greek text of the Acts is a version from Syriac. For example the 'Hymn of the Soul' is undoubtedly has a Syriac taste and can be ascribed to Bardaisan the famous Syrian heretic.

The Syriac provenance of the Acts of Thomas can be deduced from several facts. This work manifests various features of the early Syrian Christianity. A very good example is the descent of Christ to Sheol as we read in ch.10 and Christ as the Bridegroom and Incarnation as 'putting on the body'. This expression of 'put on the body' is a standard expression for the process of Incarnation in the Syrian Christianity. The Acts speaks about a Trinity, which consists of Father, Mother and Son, the Mother assuming the solace of the Holy spirit. Again, the ascetic trends of Syriac spirituality are seen in the Acts.¹⁷ F.C. Burkitt deduces the Syriac provenance of the Acts from the following facts: mistranslations of Syriac phrases into Greek, the name Judas Thomas and evidences from geography and proper names.¹⁸

3.1. 'Twinship' of Thomas

The name 'Judas Thomas' is a proof for its Syriac provenance. This designation is a feature mostly prevalent in Syriac literature. There we find the name Judas always before the name Thomas.¹⁹ The consideration of the apostle Thomas as the twin of Jesus also

¹⁵ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 9.

¹⁶ See the details in A.F.G. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, Commentary* (Leiden, 1962) 10-15.

¹⁷ Sebastian Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam, 1989) 50-51.

¹⁸ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 16.

¹⁹ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 6-7.

admits a Syrian origin. There are many occasions in the Acts where the apostle is described as the twin of the Lord. It was always in the works of the Syriac tradition that this twinship of Thomas is upheld.²⁰ The word Thomas means 'twin' (in Greek *Didymos*). He must have a name of his own and that might be 'Judas'. When the Syriac tradition gives Thomas the first name Judas, we read in Mt. 13:55 and Mk. 6:3 a Judas, brother of Jesus. And in Acts we find the author calls Thomas the twin-brother of the lord.

The author sets in the life of Thomas many incidents which are parallel with the incidents in the life of Our Lord. This characteristic was closely connected with the representation of the apostle as the twin brother of Jesus. The author prefers such a portrayal in connection with the tradition of the martyrdom of Thomas. When the author writes that the apostle is speared to death he had in mind the fact that a soldier pierced His side with a spear while Jesus was on the cross. Besides this one there are a number of other parallels in the life of Thomas and Jesus such as both of them as carpenters, both raise the dead both were scourged and after the death both appeared to the disciples.²¹ Thus one can say that the original language of the Acts was Syriac and from Syriac it was translated into Greek and later it was retranslated into Syriac.

4. The author, composition and the place

4.1. Author of this book

With regard to the authorship of this book there is no unanimity among the scholars. All agree with the fact that it was written in Syria. Some are of the opinion that it was written by a Gnostic as this was seen used in the Gnostic circles; while others attribute its authorship to any Manichean because of its Manichean influence. Bardaisan or any of his disciples is another general opinion. St. Ephrem and St. Augustine attribute its authorship to a disciple of Bardaisan. Acts was written in a very early period as a manual of instruction for the visitors to the shrine of St. Thomas whose remains was brought from India to Edessa in a wooded case by a Jewish Christian of Edessa.²² The translation of body of St. Thomas from India to Edessa was well attested by St. Ephrem also.

The Gnostics to propagate their principles might have utilized this well known source of the apostolate of Thomas in India to their advantage and the lament of Ephrem may be a reacting to this. But if our assumption that it was written first as a manual for the pilgrims to the shrine of Thomas, it must have been written in an orthodox sense by an orthodox Christian of Edessa. And the text

²⁰ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore 2005) 17.

²¹ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 7-9.

²² St. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Miraculorum* I.32 (PL LXXI) col. 733.

that Egeria mentions in her journal must have been this prototype. But the Acts we have in our possession is one that was manipulated by the Gnostics incorporating the various hymns to propagate their ideologies.²³

4.2. Place and date of its composition

4.2.1. Edessa, the place of composition

It is difficult to determine precisely the place and date of this work. The general consensus is that it was written in the Syriac milieu, and most probably Edessa – a city in Northern Mesopotamia, the centre of Syriac Christianity. Edessa, the centre of Syriac Christianity claims also the apostolic tradition of St. Thomas. The story of Jesus and king Abgar is a proof for the same.²⁴ Thus Edessa has the distinction of being the first great city to become Christian. Eusebius in Ecclesiastical History speaks about the evangelization of Edessa.²⁵ Edessa has also the privilege to possess the body of St. Thomas that had been brought from India. At least by the end of 4th century the Church of Edessa had as a relic the bones of St. Thomas; they were seen there by Egeria, a Christian lady from Spain, on 19th April 384, and mentioned in her travel diary, which survives to this day. She mentions also as having seen the Acts kept in the Church so

as to furnish the pilgrims the history of St. Thomas the Apostle.²⁶ St. Ephrem gives the details of the translation of body of St. Thomas to Edessa in *Carmina Nisibena*.²⁷ Thus we can speak of a Thomas tradition prominent in Edessa.

Though it is written in Edessa the persons and places narrated in it are Indian. But the author does not give the details. Either he is ignorant of them or he did not care to describe them. If he had been ignorant how could he write on these persons and places of another land? He could not have simply fabricated them; he should have then made use of some existing documents prevalent in his own land.²⁸ But he is not interested in the details. He is concerned with what he wants to impart his readers.

But at the same time the Syrian tradition had always upheld the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. So we need not feel astonished if a book written in Edessa deals with the mission of their apostle in another country. It also reveals to us that at the time of the composition of this apocryphal book, a certain tradition either written or oral of the mission of the apostle Thomas in India existed in and around Edessa.²⁹

²³ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore 2005) 14-15.

²⁴ See the details of this story in S.H. Moffet, *A History of Christianity in Asia I* (New York, 1992) 46-48

²⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*. I. XIII (PG XX) col.120.

²⁶ B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York, 1987) 351.

²⁷ St. Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena* 42. This text gives the living tradition in Edessa on the relics of the apostle and on his mission to India. See P. Yousif, *The Apostle Thomas in the Witness of Ephrem of Nisibis*, in Charles Payngot (ed.) *Homage to Mar Carattil, Pioneer, Malabar Ecumenist* (Rome, 1987) 79.

²⁸ J.N. Farquhar postulated a theory corroborating with a statement from Didascalia that St. Thomas had written letters from India. See J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India*, as quoted in J. Menacherry (ed.), *The Nazranis* (Indian Church History Classics) (Trichur, 1998) 323.

²⁹ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 12-13

4.2.2. Date of composition

There is no clear mention of the date of composition of this work. Some hold it to be the second half of the second century and others to be of the first half of the third century A.D. The text of Acts is mentioned in the travel diary of Egeria. Egeria was a pilgrim lady from Spain who visited the Holy Land probably in the fourth century. She has left a travel diary in which she gives details of all the churches and the places she visited.³⁰ She mentions in her diary that she visited the martyrdom of St. Thomas and read some texts of St. Thomas. According to the diary the date of the visit is given as 19-21 April 384 A.D. These texts of Thomas could be the Acts of Thomas that narrates the mission of Thomas in India and his martyrdom there.³¹ According to Ephrem any disciple of Bardaisan was behind the composition of this work and it was written some times after the death of Bardaisan in 227. Bardaisan himself had never spoken of the Acts or of the mission of St. Thomas in India. But he mentions the presence of Christians in Parthia and that may well mean the Christians in the Kushan Empire.³² Thus one can conclude that Acts was written around 225-250 A.D.

5. Habban, the trade commissssioner of Gundaphar

Besides the apostle Thomas and the two kings Gundaphar and Gad, a fourth

personality is also mentioned in the Acts, called the merchant Habban. This name is not Parthian but semitic. If so, he is a Jew, of Parthia. He is said to have gone from India to the West to bring Thomas to India and he introduces Thomas to the king Gundaphar. He can be considered a representative of the king, or a commissioner in charge of the king's external trade. If a Parthian Jew, then he should be a Christian who is entrusted with the task of bringing the apostle to the Parthian king. We read in the Acts of the Apostles the event of Pentecost and during this event thousands of Jews in dispersion were present in Jerusalem. In the list of countries from where the Jews came comes first Parthia.

Gundaphar was a very powerful and famous king who had engaged in manufacture and commerce on a large scale and had trade contacts with the Western countries. F.W. Thomas writes:

The king himself was a great trader, disposing of the output of his factories, workshops, and prisons, and the produce of his lands, forests and mines, for which he maintained store-houses throughout the country.³³

He again writes that the king's trade agent is called *rajavaidehaka* which means royal merchant. Thus Habban was the *rajavaidehaka* of Gundaphar.

³⁰ For details see: *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrim* (tr.) G.E. Gingras (New York 1970).

³¹ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 8-9

³² Kushan empire was established in India in the first century A.D. overthrowing the Indo-Schythians and they held supremacy over North India in the second half of the first century. Kanishka was the greatest emperor of this dynasty.

³³ F.W. Thomas, *Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge, 1900) 89.

5.1. Habban at Alexandria

Habban was an important official under the king Gundaphar. He as representative of the king is considered the resident in the king's Indian dominions residing in Taxila the then capital of Parthia. He as the royal commissioner of trade was often visiting Alexandria, the important hub of the Mediterranean world. From Alexandria it would be easy for him to go to Jerusalem for Passover and other feasts. A traveler from India starts sailing towards West late in November and reaches in Alexandria early in March and the return journey is in May and reaches the homeland in July.³⁴ According to Acts of Thomas Habban was commissioned to bring a carpenter from the west to India for the king to build palace. Thus through Habban Thomas the carpenter was thus brought to India and he meets the king and makes arrangements to build a palace. The way how Habban meets Thomas and how is he brought before the king etc. are fictitious explanations of the author.

One should naturally think that Habban, king Gundaphar's Trade Commissioner arrives in Alexandria as part of his frequent visits to the West to sell Indian goods and to buy western goods for sale in India. Habban had not expected to meet Thomas there. In the Acts we read about the discourse of both of them on various themes. Habban was glad to

meet Thomas, a disciple of Jesus. The following discourse is an example.

I have been doing my utmost on the voyage with a few Parthian merchants, friends of mine, who sailed with me; and I know that their hearts are strangely moved by the story of the Cross, but not one of them has reached the great decision. Let me bring them to you: I know they will come gladly, when I tell them that one of the men who lived with Jesus and saw Him after His resurrection is here: and who knows whether they will not accept our Lord.³⁵

5.2. Habban invites Thomas to India

Those Parthians who met Thomas in Alexandria received baptism from him fascinated by his character, his manner, his prayers, and above all his presentation of Jesus. Farquhar writes that their baptism makes an ineffable impression on the infant Church in Alexandria. Habban then welcomes Thomas to India saying: come over to India, evangelize India. The new-born Christians too asked Thomas to go with Habban to India which has territories both on the western side of the river Indus and on the east and thus to preach to the Scythians, Parthians, Greeks and Indians. Thomas could also meet the learned Hindu, Buddhist and Jain scholars and the famous ascetic philosophers, and the theists, atheists and the pantheists of India.³⁶ Thomas then protests saying that the distance is too great

³⁴ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* ed., by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 11.

³⁵ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* ed., by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 15.

³⁶ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* ed., by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 16-17.

and is a very difficult work. But his friends told him that there were excellent ships to India and also a short route from the coast of Egypt to the coast of India which need only two and a half months. They also suggest that India is a country of such size and population and of such influence in Asia that to spend one's life as the apostle of India would be to use it to the greatest possible advantage for the kingdom of Christ. Habban then made a great appeal to him in the name of Christ. Though he first doubted, hesitated and refused, at last praying to the master for guidance, finally decided to go.

6. Thomas in Alexandria

6.1. The historical setting

The missionary journey of Thomas to India in the first century was not something unimaginable nor impossible as some think. He reached India either by land route or sea route. The existence of these routes and the oft-frequented Alexandria-India travels by the traders should have helped Thomas. The account of the Acts takes him on a sea voyage to India, which at that time was the Parthian kingdom of Gundaphar with the capital Taxila. Although both land and sea routes were operational, the later were faster, safer and were used by preference by travelers. And this is what the Acts narrates.³⁷

6.2. Alexandria, the board of embarkation

In the first part of the Acts we read that Thomas starts his journey from Jerusalem. But

the starting point of his missionary journey to India should be Alexandria and not Jerusalem since Jerusalem is no port city and from where there is no route leading to India. The classical trade route to India began from Alexandria.³⁸ The purpose of the author of the Acts is neither historical nor geographical but only catechetical. That means to teach the readers that the mission of the apostles starts from Jerusalem, the Holy City of Our Lord. *De Miraculis* writes that Our Lord asks Thomas who was at Caesarea that time to go to India. Then from Jerusalem Thomas came first in Caesarea and then according to Farquahr the real missionary journey starts from Alexandria and where Habban, the trade commissioner of the Indian king Gundaphar met Thomas. That time Alexandria was the greatest port in the world and the second biggest city of the Roman Empire. Augustus through the battle of Actium obtained control of Egypt did everything to improve the trade between Egypt and the East. Under his masterly administration, commerce with Africa and Arabia and especially with India and China grew rapidly. It reached its climax under Nero. According to Mommsen, equivalent of half a million sterling was sent in Roman coinage to India annually. In those days 120 ships sailed for India from Egypt every year.³⁹

6.3. Alexandria, a meeting point of all religions

In the great city of Alexandria at that time there were Egyptians, Greeks and Jews. Besides them all the races of the Mediterranean

³⁷ Vimala Begley and Daniel de Puma (eds.), *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Route* (Delhi, 1992) 3.

³⁸ E.H. Warmington, *The Commerce Between Roman Empire and India* (New Delhi, 1995) 52.

³⁹ J.N. Farquahr, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 13.

like Abyssinians, Arabs, Indians, Parthians and men from Persian Gulf were seen in this city as residents or visitors. They were all engaged in commerce or shipping or trade with the Far East. Greek was the then main medium of communication. Alexandria was at that time a place quite frequented by Indians. Pliny in his *Natural History* in 77 A.D. and Chrisostome in 100 AD write about Indians residing in Alexandria. Ptolemy might have got his surprising knowledge about India from the Indians living at Alexandria. There is no wonder in believing that Habban met Thomas at Alexandria and they set sail to India from there.⁴⁰ This was the greatest Jewish city of the ancient world forming two fifth of the whole population of Alexandria. Septuagint was the visible symbol of their strength and zeal. Under the Empire they were a wealthy community, largely engaged in trade. The existence of a large number of Jews in Alexandria should have helped Thomas in his missionary work and journey.

6.4. India – Alexandria contact

From Alexandria goods and travelers sailed up the Nile to Koptos. Thence a march of seven days across the desert brought them to Myos Hormos on the Red Sea, just outside the Gulf of Suez. Pliny's *Natural History*, written in 77 A.D., contains an interesting account of the voyage from this port to the coast of India. Originally, ships from Egypt went as far as Aden only, and there exchanged

their cargo for goods from India; but by the first century A.D. they made the complete voyage. They crept along the south and east coasts of Arabia, passed the Persian Gulf and then sailed along the coast of Baluchistan to the mouth of the Indus. But with the discovery of Monsoon winds, which blow strongly from the southwest every year from June to September, making use of it one can sail straight across the ocean north-east to the mouth of Indus. Hippalus first tried it from Cape Syagros, i.e. Ras Fartak, on the south coast of Arabia, direct to the Delta and landed at Pattala, the chief port of the time there. He thus greatly shortened the voyage from Egypt to India. The voyage from Myos Hormos, at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez, to the coast of India took about two and a half months. Vast quantities of goods from China, Central Asia and Northern India were carried by road through Parthia, Mesopotamia and Syria to the Mediterranean under the early Empire; and there was also a large trade by sea between the great ports of India and the Persian Gulf.⁴¹

7. St. Thomas in India

7.1. Thomas sets sail to India

The Acts of Thomas begins with the scene where all the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to plan the strategy of their future mission.⁴² While they were in Jerusalem, they cast lots to ascertain in which country each should preach and India fell to the lot of

⁴⁰ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 43.

⁴¹ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 20.

⁴² Acts I. 1. See the details in Chediath-Karipai, *Acts of Thomas* (Malayalm) (Kottayam 1998) 9-10.

Thomas. But he was most unwilling to go saying that he was weak and how could a Hebrew teach the Indians. While Thomas was thus reasoning Our Lord appeared to him in a vision at night and promised him His grace. Still he was not ready to go the Indians.

There happened to be in Jerusalem at that time, according to the Acts, an agent of the Indian king Gundaphar looking for a carpenter to build a palace for the king. Here follows a long discourse between the apostle and the agent of the king, a merchant called Habban. On the following day according to the will of the Lord at last Thomas agreed to go with Habban to India.

7.2. India according to the Acts

In the Acts of Thomas while describing the distribution of the regions among the apostles the word India appears in three places when Thomas is given India as his destination. The word India was used very differently by various writers and peoples of that time. The reason for this confusion is that India in former times was geographically vaster than today. The name India comes from the word River Indus or *Sindu*. It is spelt differently by different writers in different languages and this adds to the confusion. *Hendo* (Syriac), *Henda* (Aramaic), *Hodda* (Hebrew), *Hind* (Persian), *Indu* (Greek), *Hindustan* (Aramaic), *Sindhu* (Sanskrit) and *Indies* (Latin) are the different words used in different languages.⁴³ The famous ancient writers like Ptolemy, Pliny, Strabo and the author of the *Periplus of the Eritrean Sea* knew this land and

had good information of this land, which was then a subcontinent. But as a whole the Romans and the Greeks had no clear idea of this vast land. Therefore, it is not clear when they refer to India, whether they mean India proper or Persia, Arabia or even Ethiopia. While the Romans divided their empire into provinces, prefectures etc. the land outside their territory was not of much interest to them.⁴⁴ Persia, Parthia, India etc. were outside the Roman Empire.

From the time of Alexander the Great the conception that India was a country beyond Indus was prevalent in the West. For some historians river Indus is the western boundary of India, but for others regions east and west of Indus form India. If so, according to the second opinion, Pakistan, Afganistan or even a part of Persia is India. Those regions east of the river Indus is Eastern India or India Proper and those regions west of the Indus is Western India. Therefore, whether the first voyage of Thomas was to this Western India or also to the Eastern India or to Southern India is again a problem.⁴⁵

Let us now see the India narrated in the Acts. Is it the present India (India Proper) or Western India? According to Pliny many do not consider Indus to be the western boundary of India, but include in the term also four Satrapies on the side of the river, which, in the language of the modern geography, correspond to Baluchistan, Kandahar, Heart

⁴³ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 28.

⁴⁴ James Puliurumpil, *The Early Christian Settlements of Kerala* (OIRSI Kottayam, 2008) 111.

⁴⁵ James Puliurumpil, *The Early Christian Settlements of Kerala* (OIRSI Kottayam, 2008) 112.

and Kabul.⁴⁶ According to George Milnae Rae, it is in this sense of 'India west of Indus' that the name is used in Bible; and it is in this sense that St. Thomas' India is to be understood.⁴⁷

According to the Acts Habban was sent by Gundaphar, king of India. Habban, the royal trade commissioner came from the East. To an author writing in Persia, the region behind the river Indus lay in the East. This eastern part of the Indus formed also part of Persian Empire. For many authors the whole region east of the river Indus was India.⁴⁸ The author of the Acts had in mind the idea that the whole region east of the river Indus is India. From this we can conclude that Gundaphar was king of that India which included Pakistan, Punjab and Afghanistan and where St. Thomas first preached Gospel. Therefore when the Acts writes Thomas was sent to the kingdom of Gundaphar it must have meant North West India.

The Acts states that the Apostle Thomas went by sea reached Andrapolis and then proceeded to the court of king Gundaphar who was searching a man to build a palace. Thomas introduced as a carpenter, received from the king money for the erection of the palace, but spent it on the poor. The king remonstrated, but miraculous events convinced him that Thomas by spending the money on the poor had built him a palace in heaven. Hence Gundaphar and his brother Gad became Christians. Thereafter, Thomas went

to another kingdom (of Mazdai) in India where while preaching the gospel was speared to death. The chronology is quite possible and there are other details which fit perfectly into the circumstances of the time.

7.3. Apostle's voyage to India

Thomas and Habban would start from Alexandria to sail up the Nile. According to the Acts they landed in Andrapolis or Andropolis, the royal city. According to Farquar, they should have started the voyage in May 48 AD and traveled through Koptos and Myos Hormos. They would leave Okelis, the last port on the eastern side of the Red Sea, early in June and a few days sailing would take them out of the Gulf of Aden, when they would at once find themselves exposed to the full force of the great seasonal wind from the South West. They would then have to endure more than a month of the worst sailing in the world, driven furiously over the tempestuous Arabian sea by the irresistible Monsoon, lashed by wild rainstorms, the heat and the damp unendurable, many of the passengers sick and ill day and night.⁴⁹ About the middle of July they disembarked at Pattala. They would then select a suitable boat and in it would slowly ascend the great river for about 1300 miles to some point near the modern Attock, where the railway to Peshwar crossed the Indus. From there a march to the south-east of some 40 miles would bring them to Taxila. A month or more should be required

⁴⁶ J.W. McGrindle, *Ancient India Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Calcutta, 1887) 151.

⁴⁷ G.M.Rae, *The Syrian Church in India* (London, 1892) 58.

⁴⁸ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 36.

⁴⁹ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* ed., by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 22.

for the voyage up the river to arrive at Taxila about the middle of August.

According to Warmington the possible duration of sea voyage in the first century A.D. from Alexandria to the Indian coasts is in the following way: Alexandria –Coptos (up Nile by boat with wind takes 12 days; and Coptos-Berenice (by camel) also 12 days. Berencie (mid-summer) –Ocelis or Cane (with delay) needs 30 days. Ocelis- Muziris with Monsoon (also with delays) 40 days. Voyage from Cane to Barygaza would also be the same or even shorter duration.⁵⁰

8. Barygaza

After having laboured for a considerable period in Alexandria Thomas left for India for missionary work. From Alexandria Thomas took the sea-route to India which was very famous that time and was used by the travelers to go to the East. Rooney writes: if a traveler starts at Alexandria he would sail down the Nile by Memphis as far as Koptos, then by land to Berenice, through the Arabian sea to Okelis, Aden or Cana, and then to Patiala, Barygaza or Muziris.⁵¹ Thomas landed first in Sandruk (in Syriac) or Andrapolis (in Greek) or Andhrapura (Sanskrit).

According to Dahlmann Andrapolis could be Barygaza, a well-known port city on the west coast of India, the 'city of the Andhras' in India, to be identified with the present day Broach in Gujarat. This hypothesis

would fit in with the known facts of the history of the Andhras. 'There is reason to believe that the Andhra tribe had great numerical strength, originally lived in the Vindhya region and in the northern part of the Deccan, but that it pushed gradually to the south in later times.'⁵² This Andhra dynasty called Satavahna or Satakarni was founded by Simuka, who claimed Brahminical descent. This dynasty began to dominate the Andhra kingdom in the north western Deccan around 50 A.D. and it gradually became a mighty power extending its sway from Gujarat in the West to the mouth of the Krishan river in the east after vanquishing the Scythians, the Indo-Greeks and the Parthians. They expanded their kingdom to the south and probably made their capital in Andharapura on the river Televaha. By then they had under their control the sea port Kalyana on the western coast as well as the port city Barygaza on the Narmada river. One of these two cities of the Andharas, Andhrapolis could be the port city where Thomas is said to have reached in the story narrated in Acts. From there he could sail along the sea coast to the mouth of the Indus and then sail up the river to Taxila, the capital of the Indo-Parthian kingdom of Gundaphar. Alternatively, he could take the highway to the North via Ujjain and Mathura to reach Taxila. This, however, would be more laborious and dangerous, but may not be supposed to have dissuaded the dauntless Apostle Thomas.⁵³

⁵⁰ E.H. Warmington, *The Commerce Between Roman Empire and India* (New Delhi, 1995) 50.

⁵¹ J. Rooney, *Shadows in the Dark* (Rawalpindi, 1984) 26.

⁵² R. C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. II (Mumbai, 1990) 120.

⁵³ George Nedungatt, *Quest for the Historical Thomas Apostle of India* (TPI Bangalore, 2008) 249.

In the Acts we read: having set sail from Alexandria, the apostle Thomas and Habban, aided by the favourable winds, reached the shores of Andrapolis. This port of disembarkation Andrapolis (city of Andras) is according to Greek version of Acts.⁵⁴ But in the Syriac version the place is called Sandruk, and in the Latin version as Andronopolis or Adrianopolis. In the Armenian version the port of disembarkation is Snadruk. According to many historians this is Barygaza or Broach in Gujarat. This was in former times a great trade centre and a royal city of the Andras and it lies in a well traveled route. This was a city of the king of India, Gundaphar. This was also a Jewish city where do we find many Jews. Only Broach fulfill all these qualities, according to Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. The author of this book has devoted a great length of his volume to describe the port city of Barygaza and its neighbouring places. The author seems to have gone there personally, because his description is so vivid and minute.⁵⁵ This is the present day Broach in Gujarat, north of Mumbai. Barygaza had been connected to all parts of India. Products of interior land were brought to this port for trade by land or by the river Narmada.

9. Taxila

There is an implicit reference in the Acts that from Barygaza Thomas went to Taxila,

the then capital of the Parthian kingdom. Habban the trade commissioner of Gundaphar, who knew well the route from Barygaza to Taxila, accompanied him. Both these cities had very good political and commercial relations that time. When all other apostles chose great centres of learning and culture as their destination, it is quite natural that Thomas also selected one such famous and important centre of learning and civilization, Taxila. Taxila had that time Buddhist and Jain centres of learning. It had also a great Zoroastrian temple 158 feet long and 85 feet wide.⁵⁶ Philostratus, in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, says that Apollonius and Damis, in the course of their travels visited Taxila. The remarks made about the palace and the houses of the city in this book is very accurate according to John Marshall who later made a deep study of the city. According to him it was in the year 44 A.D. that Apollonius visited Taxila.⁵⁷

The kingdom of Gundaphar that time occupied a very vast region in the north-western parts of India which included the present Afghanistan, Pakistan and Punjab. The coins found in these regions were proofs for the same.⁵⁸ Taxila, the capital of the Indo-Schythian kings was from the 5th century B.C. a meeting place of Indian, Iranian and Greek cultural influences and the remains of it had

⁵⁴ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 21.

⁵⁵ W. Vincent, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, vol. II (New Delhi, 1998) 411.

⁵⁶ See the details in John Marshall, *Guide to Taxila* (Calcutta, 1921) 15.

⁵⁷ J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas* (ed.), by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 26.

⁵⁸ E.J. Rapson, *Indian Coins* (Strasburg, 1897) 15.

been unearthed in the mid 19th century and today lie scattered around in an area of almost six kilometers, twenty kilometers away from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Today the remains of this great city are seen in Sirkap to the East and North East of Sarai-Kala, twenty miles north west of Rawalpindi. Though Taxila was the capital Gundaphar had courts also at Kabul and Peshwar. It was a meeting point of different trade routes and a cosmopolitan city where different cultures and centres met together. The Royal Highway which comes from the Eastern India and a second one from Western Asia and a third one from Kashmir and Central Asia are these three routes. When these routes ceased to be important the city sank into insignificance and was finally destroyed by the Huns in the 45 A.D.⁵⁹

Taxila was a very famous city before the Christian Era. It was a well-governed, populous and wealthy city. Close by, at Salatura, was born India's master grammarian Panini. He may have been a teacher in the university of Taxila when Alexander was entertained in Taxila by King Ambhi. The pali form of the name is *Taksasila*, which means rock of the Taksha, the great Naga king. The classical writers are unanimous in their accounts of the fame and wealth of this *Taxasila*. Arrian describes it as 'a large and wealthy city, and the most populous between Indus and

Hydapsus.⁶⁰ Strabo narrates it to be a large city and the land very fertile.⁶¹ Pliny calls it a famous city.⁶²

Taxila was founded by Bharata, younger brother of Rama. The city was named after Bharata's son Taksa, its first ruler. The Indian epic Mahabharata was first recited at Taxila at the great snake sacrifice of the king Janamejaya. Alexander the Great had been there in the fourth century B.C.⁶³ At the time of Macedonian invasion in 326 B.C. Taxila was a very rich and flourishing city and it was ruled by Omphis(Ambhi) who is generally called by his dynastic title Taxiles.⁶⁴

After the break-up of Alexander's empire, a number of invaders occupied the region around Taxila. Some thirty years after Alexander's visit, Asoka was stationed at Taxila, ruling the provinces of the north-west as Viceroy under his father Bidusara. He would travel the whole way from Pataliputra to Taxila – over a 1000 miles- on the Royal Road constructed for military and commercial purposes, by his grandfather Chandragupta. After sometime Asoka made it his residence while he held the vice-royalty of Punjab. Mauryan emperors of India added the northwestern territories to their empire in the third century B.C. Then it was wrested by the Indo-Scythians, of whom Gundaphar was the greatest. Indo-Parthians drove the Sakas

⁵⁹ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 79.

⁶⁰ A. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography of India* (London, 1871) 106.

⁶¹ J.W. McGrindle, *Ancient India Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Calcutta, 1887) 22.

⁶² B.C. Law, *Historical Geography of India* (Delhi, 1984) 129.

⁶³ V.A. Smith, *Early History of India* (New Delhi, 1993) 110.

⁶⁴ See the details in A. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography of India* (London, 1871) 106.

further south in the first century A.D. From the hands of the Indo-Schyrians it passed over to the Kushans when they ultimately overthrew the last Indo-Greek kingdom of India, probably in 51 A.D. after the time of Gundaphar.⁶⁵

9. King Gundaphar

In the Acts we read that Habban was sent by Gundaphar, 'king of India' to fetch a carpenter to build a palace in the capital of his kingdom. But in the Acts we do not find any description of this king or his kingdom. But with the discovery of the coins of Gundaphar historians could write the history of the person of Gundaphar and about place. The coins were discovered in 1834 and the connection of these coins and the Acts was discovered in 1848. These coins were found in successive years from a large area such as Kabul, Kandahar, Seistan and Western and Southern Punjab.⁶⁶ On one side of the coins there were inscriptions in Greek and on the reverse side in Karoshti scripts. Karoshti was the form of writing in North West India. It could be the Prakrit, the ancient form of Sanskrit.⁶⁷ All these coins bore the title *autocratos* which means 'king of kings' in the Prakrit, a title used by all Parthian emperors. One can notice slight difference in the use of the name of Gundaphar. For example: *Gondophorasa*, *Gudapharnasa*, *Gudapharasa* etc. and of the title

given to the emperor *Maharaja*, *Rajarajasa*, *Rajadiraja* etc.⁶⁸

According to the historians a close study of the names and the titles used in the coins makes it clear that Gundaphar was a great king who made extensive conquests and established a great empire of his own in North West India which included modern Punjab, Pakistan and Afghanistan. He was an Indo-Parthian who had his capital at Taxila and who ruled over a vast domain from 21-51 A.D.

9.1. Historical evidences

The inscriptions discovered at a place called Takht-i-Bahi, near to Peshwar in 1872 is another important document connected with Gundaphar. Cunningham who made a deep study of it made it clear that the king mentioned here is the same the one in the coins who started his reign in 21 A.D. The inscription of Takht-i-Bahi dated 46 A.D. makes Gundaphar a real contemporary of St. Thomas. From the coins it is clear that Gundaphar died in 51 A.D. It was in 52 that Thomas then came to Kerala. Thus both traditions –North Indian and South Indian–agree with regard to the arrival and activities of St. Thomas in India, first in North and then in South. Soon after the death of Gundaphar Kushans invaded his kingdom and destroyed the wealthy city of Taxila in the middle of the first century A.D.

⁶⁵ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 82.

⁶⁶ For the details on the coins see the following books: 1) H.H. Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua, Antiquities and Coins of Afganishthan* (London, 1871), 2) C.J. Rodrigues, *Coin Collecting in Northern India* (Allahabad, 1894), 3) V.A. Smith, *Catalogue of Coins of Indian Museum* (Oxford, 1906).

⁶⁷ A.L. Bashan, *Wonder that was India* (Delhi 1998) 397.

⁶⁸ See the details in James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005)

From a deep study it is clear that Gundaphar of Taxila is the king of Acts of Thomas. During that time there should have Christians in the kingdom of Gundaphar according to Bardaissan. This presence of the Christians must have been a reason for the author to connect these places with the story of Thomas. Thomas was well received by the king and he was even allowed to stay longer in the city. No foreigner was allowed to stay longer in the city according to the law of the country.⁶⁹ But Thomas had been allowed to stay long and preach his religion in his country. Taxila was a city of tolerance having temples of Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Hindus. So under this circumstance it would not have been difficult for the apostle to find a welcoming friend in Gundaphar in the city and to receive freedom of travel and speech.⁷⁰

Regarding the visit of St. Thomas in the kingdom of Gundaphar Charpentier, basing on the documents, has the following remark:

A Christian missionary belonging to the disciples of Our Lord himself and called by the tradition St. Thomas may have found his way, in the company of a merchant from Punjab or from Kabul, to the realm of Gondophernes, a ruler of Iranian origin who between 19 and 45 A.D was the overlord of North Western India and Afghanistan ... That

he converted Gondophernes and his house is, of course, a pious legend; but judging from the religious tolerance of that time, witnessed by the coins of the Kushans and the ruins of Taxila, Gondophernes may well have tolerated and even encouraged his missionary zeal.⁷¹

Therefore with sufficient reasons we can say that the king mentioned in Acts of Thomas is the Indo-Parthian king Gundaphar and it was to his capital at Taxila that St. Thomas came and preached Gospel as we read in the Acts of Thomas.

10. Historical veracity of Acts

From a deep study of the Acts of Thomas one can come to the conclusion that Acts which was written in Edessa, in the first half of the third century A.D. provides us with a lot of information regarding certain persons and places. The numismatic evidences coincide with the explanations seen in the Acts. This is true more with the case of king Gundaphar, his brother Gad, the Royal Commissioner Habban, St. Thomas the apostle and Taxila, the capital of Gundaphar. The coins discovered prove that Gundaphar was a Parthian king, who ruled Parthia as well as India. When the Acts says that Gundaphar ruled India, Church of Alexandria, according to Origen, knew that he was a Parthian, but

⁶⁹ Charpentier while narrating the story of Apollonius writes that he and his companion were granted permission to stay in the city only for three days and later when the king was pleased with his guests they received an extended permission. From the story of Apollonius it is clear that foreigners were not allowed to stay longer in the city or at least inside the city walls, according to the law of the country. See the details in J. Charpentier, *The Indian Voyage of Apollonius of Tyana* (Uppsala, 1934) 50.

⁷⁰ James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 91.

⁷¹ J. Charpentier, St. Thomas the Apostle and India, as quoted in James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 91.

did not know that he ruled India too.⁷² Each has preserved half truth. Here we find two traditions- Edessan and Alexandrian- which arose from one historical event.

The author of the Acts should have made use of any previous document existing in the land of Edessa. Otherwise how can he get the accurate details of the city of Taxila, which lies 2000 miles away from Edessa. Somebody should have sent a letter containing the works of Thomas in the Indian kingdom with the details of the king and the kingdom to Edessa, a Christian town. Or somebody in Edessa demanded such a letter to show their connection and reverence to Thomas their apostle. The circumstances might have demanded or facilitated the same. There are other references to show that Thomas was very highly revered in the Edessan Church. That was the reason why his bones were translated to Edessa from Mylapore. He should have visited first Broach then proceeded to Taxila, the capital. Thus the visit of the apostle Thomas to North India remains a viable historical hypothesis which becomes a historically proven fact with the help of other supportive evidences.

Those who reject the historical veracity of Acts are those who have not made any considerable effort to study the issues in detail. They just assume that Acts does not contain any historical data.⁷³ But it is clear that the

author of Acts is sure about the persons and places that he had made use of in the book. The numismatic and archeological discoveries of the last century have altered the interpretations that had been given to the Acts. Unless we read the Acts in relation with the ancient geography and history of India, we will never be able to comprehend the full import of the story of Acts. The power of the Kushan empire put an end to the rule of Gundaphar. Followingly might have happened the translation of the body of Thomas to Edessa for safety. This translation of the body might have happened before the composition of the Acts. This presence of the relics of Thomas in Edessa could prove strongly the historicity of Acts.

The Kushan invasion gave a dead blow to the Indo-Parthian and its decline became a reality in the middle of the first century A.D. Taxila was thoroughly devastated and no foreign visitor could have stayed on with security any longer in the city. This troubled political situation of the region should have prompted Thomas to leave that country of Gundaphar of which Acts says he went to another country (of Mazdai)⁷⁴, after the apostle had entrusted the care of the flock to Xantipus the deacon.⁷⁵ This another country or that of Mazdai is the then South Indian kingdom where St. Thomas arrived in 52 A.D. and where he worked hard for Christ and became a martyr at Mylapore in 72 A.D.

⁷² J.N. Farquhar, *The Apostle Thomas in North India According to the Acts of Thomas*, (ed.) by Jacob Vellian (OIRSI Kottayam, 1972) 15.

⁷³ See the details in James Kurukilamkatt, *First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India* (ATC Bangalore, 2005) 155.

⁷⁴ Acts 7. 46. See the details in S.H. Moffet, *A History of Christianity in India*, vol. (New York, 1992) 28.

⁷⁵ George Nedungatt, *Quest for the Historical Thomas Apostle of India* (TPI Bangalore, 2008) 249.

Reflections for - Life in the Church

Fr. Johnson Vadakkumcherry

Introduction

The Church is a continuation of the life of Christ. The present Catholic Church has acquired its shape having passed through various phases of history: through moments of bitter trials and wonderful triumphs due to reasons from within and without. The Church as an organism was and is guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church today with its institutional and structural advantages is trying to reinvent itself more lively and original. The life of the Church derives from the life of the Lord; in other words, it originates from the lively Eucharistic celebration. Often the life of the Church is limited or circumscribed especially to the ceremonial-liturgical moments inside the church building. To make the faithful alive outside and after the Eucharistic celebration is the intent of this article. Looking at the face of Pope John Paul II, just few months before his death, one of my friends commented that the face of the Church is the same as that of the Pope. It is aged-low-slow, neither understanding nor undertaking. However, he did not fail to notice the glowing eyes of the Pontiff. The radiant eyes of the pope instilled a lot of confidence and hope in the minds of

all, specially the youth. Yes, the Church is lovely and lively!

1. Church as Mystical Body

Is Church an organized society or a spiritual communion? Basically both society and communion admit the fact that the Church is built upon human persons. According to the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church is in its inner core a community (*Gemeinschaft*); in its outer core, however it is a society (*Gesellschaft*).¹ The society is an outward expression of the inner community. The community is the real Church as contrasted with the phenomenal Church. The inner fellowship of men with God enables them for the outer expression of fellowship with one another in Christ. It is both a community and an institution of salvation. According to Yves Congar, the Church, in its ultimate reality, is a community of persons.² According to Hamer, both the external and internal aspects are essential. The Church, "the mystical body of Christ, is a communion which is at once inward and external, an inner communion of spiritual life (of faith, hope and charity) signified and engendered by an external communion in profession of faith,

¹ A. DULLES, *Models of the Church* (First Image book Edition, New York, 1987) 49.

² Y. CONGAR, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, Md Newman, 1965) 28-58.

discipline ad sacramental life.”³ Hamer emphasizes the distinctive vertical height or the divine dimension than the horizontal or a merely social order in the Church. All the social commitments and undertakings rest upon the deeper spiritual communion of grace and charity. The Tübingen school theologian Mohler and his associates popularized the idea of the Church as a supernatural organism vivified by the Holy Spirit, a fellowship sustained by the outpouring of divine grace.⁴

The Church is an organism that can grow, repair itself, and adapt itself to the changing situations, and unlike any other natural organism, the Body of Christ has a divine life-principle or foundation. However the Church according to the Fathers like Augustine is not essentially visible because it includes angels and separated souls, still less is it societal because it includes all the persons animated by the Spirit of God. For St. Thomas Aquinas the Church consists essentially in a divinizing communion with God, incompletely in this earth and completely in the life of glory. Pius XII in his *Mystici Corporis* defined Church as the mystical Body of Christ and stated that it is identical with the Roman Catholic Church. The pope tries to harmonize the Mystical Body with the societal Church. In *Lumen Gentium* the idea of the Church as a blending of hierarchy and Christ is emerging. The LG does not identify Mystical Body to the only Catholic Church. The leading theme on the Church in Vatican II is, the Church as “people of God.”

The democracy and freedom between the people and God; a spirit filled people for mutual service - which the Vatican II has recognized to be revitalized in today's context. The new People of God in the NT has the history of being called together. Their assembly is more relevant in the divine and human viewpoints. They were people praying especially in groups or assemblies. In short the Church is a communion of believers in God, at prayer. According to Muhler, the Church is one person (Holy Spirit) in many Persons (Christ and us). It is “personological” which is both sanctificatory and consecratory.⁵ In the Mystical Body the primary point is of the spiritual grace; interior grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Mystical communion is a more biblical and spiritual theme about the Church. From the ecumenical point of view the Mystical Body is more meaningful and relevant than a societal concentration. It opens the doors for the Holy Spirit. The interpersonal relationship helps members of the Church find meaning in each other's life. The divine values of the societal as well as the communion aspects are stressed equally in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

2. The Scriptural Shaping of the Church

Right understanding and living of the Word is necessary to enliven the Church. “The Word of God is the entire content of Revelation as contained in the Holy Bible and

³ J. HAMER, *The Church is a Communion* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1964) 93.

⁴ DULLES, *Models*, 50

⁵ *Ibid*, 56.

proclaimed in the Church”⁶ It is the Word that became man (Cf. Jn 1:1). The Church is a congregation constituted by the Word, being proclaimed and heard faithfully. The Word gives the faithful new ideas and programme for life. The Word constantly summons people for repentance and reform. The Church is a group of faithful called out due to their response to the Word. Through the obedient adherers of the word the kingdom is established in the world. “For who ever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mt 12:50; Mk 3:35). According to St. Ephrem and Aphrahaat, the OT is completed by the NT. Both the testaments are necessary to understand the salvation history. In the same manner human life shall be made meaningful in the light of the Sacred Scriptures. The appeal of the Word to the present day church will be for an appreciation of the same, in order to be true Christians. As the Word became event in the history, the word of God shall turn into the life-events of individuals, families and the society at large.

The scriptural shaping of the Church in India demands more preparation from the preachers because of the religious pluralism in the country. Understanding the Word of God in the background of other religious scriptures like *Upanishads*, *Gita*, *Koran* is essential to give life to the Church. The historically ‘shielded word’ of the Catholic became a ‘unbolted engine’ to the Protestants. What is

important is to take the dynamism or the kerygma in the Word serious. Not to limit the variety of the Word within the letters of the Bible alone; rather enter into the other scriptures, to find the truths in them and to improve on them. The tendency to limit the truth into the Bible alone is strong in the active evangelists. The proclamation of the Word neglecting action is counter-witnessing. The word of God is, God’s announcements and man’s listening; not only in the written format but in and through all possible means – for life in the Church.

3. Fathers Feed the Church

Fathers are the successors of the heads of the Churches or bishops or defenders of faith of Christian antiquity (the first eight centuries). Certain qualifications: a) orthodoxy of doctrine, b) holiness of life, c) ecclesiastical approval d) antiquity - are necessary to call them so. How did they influence or make their Churches energetic? Hamell explains that the Fathers are important for - their writings or the sources of doctrine, their exegetical works, better knowledge of Christ’s teachings, being the unifying element of all Christian bodies, immense value to preachers, and for their abundance of Christian feeling.”⁷ Fathers Ephrem and Aphrahat, typical representatives of the “teachers of the paschal lamb,” though they taught in hymnal forms and in expositions or demonstrations, they reflected the life situation of the Church of their time - the liturgical and social differences and deviations.⁸

⁶ CCC 65, 81, 101, 241.

⁷ P.J. HAMELL, *Handbook of Patrology* (New York, 1968) 11,12.

⁸ A.G. KOLLAMPARAMBIL, *From Symbol to Truth* (Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, Roma, 2000) 87.

The Fathers took the liturgy and the Word serious. The spirit of worship in the East Syrian Tradition includes: Trinitarian, Anthropological, Biblical, Ecclesial, Eucharistic, Eschatological and existential dimensions, which reminds us about the spiral and cyclic nature of the liturgy originating from heaven and returning to the same derivation.⁹ The Fathers explained the Word before anaphora, so that their life might be reflected more deeply and brought into the Eucharist. In their mystagogical homilies they proclaimed the Word pointing their hands to the altar. In other words the homily was centred on the Lord. In other words the liturgy is made lively because of the scriptural explanations by the Fathers taking into account the way of life and reflecting them from the view point of the Lord from the altar. The centrifugal and centripetal dynamisms of Church life originate and culminate in the Eucharist.

4. The Church lives in and through the Sacraments

“Sacrament is an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ They are celebrated in the church, in the various stages of a person’s life, indicating how helpful they are in his/her pilgrimage on earth. In order to live, one must obviously be born (baptism), grow in maturity (confirmation), nourish

himself with food (Eucharist), heal his wounds (penance), receive tonic to cure infirmities (anointing of the sick), and as a member of the society he helps for a spiritual order in the society (Holy Orders), propagate the human race (Matrimony). In short sacraments regulate the life of every Christian.¹¹

The Fathers of the Church wrote mostly on the sacraments of initiation: Baptism Confirmation and the Eucharist. They explained them basing on Scriptures and community living. Baptism is there because man was originally moulded in clay, mixture of earth and water. His sin spoiled or debilitate his nature, and he became a spoiled vessel - useless for his maker’s purpose. The Lord asks Prophet Jeremiah to observe the potter at work (Jer 18: 2-6). If displeased, he would flatten, reshape, and dip the clay in water for a second time. “Can I not do the same with you house of Israel?” (Jer 18: 2-6). “In the same way we who are mortal, inconsistent and always tending towards dissolution are renewed and formed afresh in the waters of baptism...making us immortal, imperishable, and permanently sealed in our character as children of God.”¹² Fathers interpreted sacraments for life; taking examples from life.

With confirmation, the earthen vessel is filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit and it becomes a new creation and a temple of the Holy Spirit. In the sacrament of chrismation,

⁹ *Ibid*, 153-184.

¹⁰ CCC 774, 1131.

¹¹ F.J. SHEEN, *These are the Sacraments* (Image Books, New York, 1962) 18-19.

¹² A.M. CONIARIS, *These are the Sacraments* (Light and Life, Minnesota 1981) 52. The author cites Theodore of Mopsuestia for explaining Baptism.

one receives the seal of the Holy Spirit to complete and perfect the work begun in baptism (St. Ambrose); it is the final seal which "completes" and "perfects" the initiation and empowers one with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nicolas Cabasilas sees confirmation as the sacrament for growing spiritually in the life of Christ in contrast to baptism the sacrament of birth or beginning of the new life.¹³ It prepares one for a spiritual combat. The final anointment on the breast according to Cyril of Jerusalem is to put on the breastplate of justice, that one might stand up against the attacks of demons to resist the hostile powers. It is for awakening of the spiritual senses. Anointing on the forehead is to free one from the shame of the first man so that he may be able to contemplate freely the glory of God with open face as in mirror. The seal is a mark for joining the "army," a "soldier of the king of heaven." Thus each baptized and chrismated Christian is called to serve, to study, to pray, to witness, to grow to be an apostle, to be a royal priesthood and a holy people; "to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1Pet 2:9).

Eucharist is called the sacrament of sacraments. "I am the bread of life...if any one who eats of this bread will live for ever; ...Lord give us this bread always" (Jn 6:32-34). "For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in

him" (Jn 6:55-56). These spiritual food and drink communicating immortal life is a medicine or antidote against sin and death (St. Ignatius of Antioch). "We cannot do without the Holy communion everyday. That would mean being without Christ" (Mother Theresa). This spiritual food is necessary for every Christian in order to organize his life in communion with God and with one another. "Like infants at the breast, draw out the grace of the Spirit; let it be our one sorrow not to partake of this food" (St. John Chrysostom).¹⁴ The liturgical and sacramental life of the Easterners is appreciated by those who have tried to know them. But there is no measure to read the life and growth of the Church, except finding them divinized in and through the sacraments.

Conclusion

The very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the first food eaten there, were communion elements. Buzz Aldrin, one of the first men on moon had carried communion along with him. He said "I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon the wine curled slowly and gracefully up the side of the cup. Is the body and blood of Christ shaping the church of today? Liturgy, the "summit and source" of Christian life is yet to wave and rock the believers. As elucidated in the above titles, Church as the mystical body has to absorb its energy from the Eucharistic

¹³ *Ibid*, 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 126.

body of Christ - be vivified by the Word - articulated in the style and methods of the Fathers, and nurtured by the means of the sacraments. The faithful receive the sacraments in different stages of their life. The benefits of the sacraments to the participants do vary; hence there shall be new efforts to interpret the sacraments taking into account the multiple models and approaches to the same. Devotion to life, especially from the monastic traditions

is a big store for improving life in the Church. But taking stock of the monastic tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church may lead to dismay. The type of monasticism before the coming of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century may not be retraceable nor is it significant in today's changed condition. What is important is to catch the spirit of the monastic traditions and live it in today's style, being respectful to the past and hopeful of the future.



Jesus and the Set Times of the Liturgy of the Hours

Rev. Prof. John Moolan

Introduction

Biblically a day is divided into eight parts — four *watches* of the night and four *hours* of the day. The monks used to pray eight times a day, but at present the whole Christendom suppressing one of the little hours¹ follow seven set times of prayers in imitation of Jewish custom of praising the Lord seven times a day: “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances” (Ps 118:164).

Liturgically the day is counted from evening to evening, a Jewish tradition, which the Christians accepted whole heartedly due to its spiritual impact. It is the paschal experience of Israel (Ex 12) that prompted

them to count the day this way. For them the first paschal night was the beginning of their decisive liberation from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. It was the dawning of a new day of salvation. This wonderful experience of God’s slavific act prompted them to count the day from evening to evening. Hence the author of the creation account counts the day from the evening declaring, “Evening came and morning came, first day...second day” and so on (Gen 1). Evening and morning were the two great signs of cosmic salvation for the Israel. The setting sun reminded them of God the liberator through the paschal revelation; and the rising sun reminded them of God the creator through the global revelation.

Morning

The rising sun
Global revelation
Creator

Evening

The setting sun
Paschal revelation
Liberator

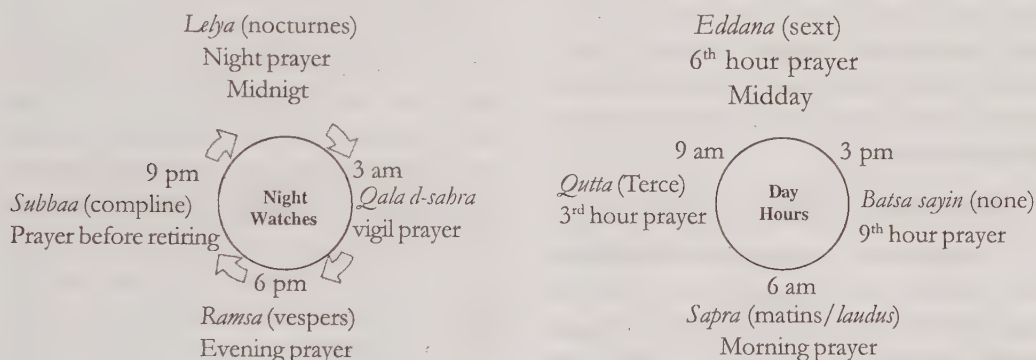
Different Watches and Hours²

The four parts of the night are known as, 1. The first watch (6 p.m.–9 p.m.), 2. The second watch (9 p.m.–midnight), 3. The third watch (Midnight to 3 a.m.), and 4. The fourth

¹ They are the third (9 a.m.), sixth (midday), and ninth (3 p.m.) hours, generally short, which came into existence through the monastic practice of renovation of the spirit of prayer during the day to fulfill the duty of praying always.

² See S.PUDUCHERY, *Ramsa: An Analysis and Interpretation of the Chaldean Vespers* (Bangalore, 1972) appendix VI, p. xiv-xvii.

watch (3 a.m. to 6 a.m.). The four parts of the day are known as, 1. The first hour (6 a.m.), 2. The third hour (9 a.m.), 3. The sixth hour (midday), and 4. The ninth hour (3 p.m.). Among the East Syrians the prayers connected to these times are called *Ramsa* (evening – vespers) at the first watch, *Subbaa* (plenitude/satisfaction – compline) at the second watch, *Lelya* (night – nocturnes) at the third watch, *Qale d-sabra* (call of waking – vigil) at the fourth watch, *Sapra* (morning – matins/lauds/prime) at 6 a.m., *Qutta* (third hour – terce) at 9 a.m., *Eddana* (sixth hour – sext) at midday, and *Batsa sayin* (ninth hour – none) at 3 p.m.



Relevance of Jesus

The importance of Jesus at these eight parts of the day indicates the presence of Jesus in the prayer system for sanctifying personal life throughout the day and night. The purpose of each set time prayer is well fitted to the life situation of Jesus and the apostles at it.

1. Watches

a. *Ramsa* (evening) – vespers

Ramsa is the evening prayer at sunset around 6 p.m., the first watch of night, to begin the liturgical day. The purpose is to dedicate the whole day to the Lord for obtaining a peaceful evening, comfortable night, hopeful morning, and virtuous day. The evening sluggishness of day's toil is being pacified at this prayer system, confronting Jesus as the peace maker in times of troubles in life.

Jesus in the evening

The evening miraculous interventions of Jesus established peace and comfort among the people around, because He was the one who proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord as the true liberator of the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (Lk 4:18-19; Is 61:1-2)

1. Jesus at Peter's house

"When Jesus entered Peter's house, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her. That evening they brought to Him many who were possessed with demons; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick" (Mt 8:14-16). Just as that evening Jesus cured all the afflicted brought to Him, so also in the evening prayer we too have to present before Jesus all our difficulties to be pacified by Him.

2. Taking down of the cross and burial

"When it was evening there came a rich man, Joseph from Arimathea. Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock" (Mt 27:57, 59-60). Just as that evening Jesus got a noble burial, so also through the evening prayer we too have to bury our difficulties of the day with Jesus to find out peace and joy in life.

3. Calming down of the tempest

"When it was evening He told them that let us go across to the other side. And a great storm of wind arose... but He was in deep sleep... They woke Him up... He rebuked the wind, and the wind ceased" (Mk 4:35, 37-39). Just as that evening Jesus pacified the troubled apostles, so also through the evening prayer we too have to approach the Lord to get relief from the troubles of the day.

4. Cleansing of the temple

"He entered Jerusalem, went into the temple and watched around at everything. And it was already late, He went out to Bethany

with the twelve" (Mk 11:11; cf. Mt 21:12-17). Just as that evening Jesus regained the sanctity of the temple, so also through the evening prayer we too have to maintain the holiness of the body as the temple of God in serving God and the people.

5. Multiplication of bread

"When the sun was setting the twelve came to Him and said, 'send the crowd away... we have only five loaves and two fish'... He took the five loaves and the two fish... blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples for the distribution. All ate and were satisfied. And they took up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces" (Lk 9:12-13, 16-17). Just as that evening Jesus satiated the people at the great need of the day, so also through the evening prayer we too have to approach the Lord to satisfy the needs of the day.

6. Apparition to the ten apostles

"On the evening of the first day of the week... Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). Just as that evening Jesus comforted the apostles with His real presence as the peace-giver, so also through the evening prayer we too have to feel the peace and joy of the Lord throughout the day.

7. Workers of the vineyard

"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first' (Mt 20:8). Just as that evening Jesus was so merciful towards the needy of the day, so also through the evening

prayer we too have to learn to be merciful to others throughout the day.

8. *Jesus, the light of the world*

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Just as Jesus is the everlasting light, so also through the evening prayer we too have to remain in Him to be enlightened to become the light of the world throughout the day.

9. *The Lamp*

"No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bowl, but on a lamp-stand, so that those who enter may see the light" (Lk 11:33). Just as the lamp is lightened to spread the light around, so also through the evening prayer we too have to be illumined to overcome the darkness of life throughout the day.

b. Subbaa (glorifying) – compline (retiring prayer)

This is the bedtime prayer around 9 p.m., the second watch of night, after supper before going to sleep for the night rest. The purpose is to dedicate the whole night to God. God's protection is sought for the night rest through the repentance over sins committed during the day, because the slumber is a symbol of death.

Jesus at night

1. *Supper at Lazarus' house*

"Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper and Martha served... Mary anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house

was filled with the fragrance of ointment" (Jn 12:1-3). Just as that night Mary's act of repentance made her the fragrance of Jesus, so also through the prayer before sleep we too have to repent over sins committed during the day as a preparation for the night slumber, a symbol of death.

2. *Last Supper*

"When it was time He sat at table with the twelve disciples... As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it... and said, 'this is my body'... And He took the cup and gave thanks... and said, 'this is my blood... poured out for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:20, 26-28). Just as at that night the Eucharistic bread gave the apostles the possibility of being one with Jesus forever, so also through the prayer before sleep we too have to become one with Jesus removing the scars of life through repentance.

3. *Washing of the feet*

"Rose from supper, laid aside His garments, girded himself with a towel, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded" (Jn 13:4-5). Just as that night Jesus humbled himself to serve others, so also through the prayer before the sleep we too have to regain humbleness through the acts of repentance.

c. *Lelya* (night) – nocturnes

Lelya is the midnight prayer at the third watch of night. The purpose is to provide good thoughts of meditation for the coming day. The midnight prayer, while the world sleeps, makes the night a part of the liturgy. It

recalls also the early Christians' midnight prayers in catacombs in expectation of the imminent *Paruosia* (arrival) during night until day break. Hence the *Lelya* helps to examine the conscience in preparation for meeting the Lord at any time.

Jesus at midnight

1. Nativity:

"There were shepherds in that region keeping watch over their flock by night. An angel of the Lord appeared... and said to them... 'Behold the Saviour is born to you in the city of David...and this will be a sign for you; you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger'. Suddenly there appeared a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased'" (Lk 2:8-14). Just as at that midnight the shepherds became worthy to receive the good news of salvation, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to achieve worthiness to receive the judgement of salvation at the abrupt Second Coming of the Lord.

2. Shepherds' visit

"They went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph with the babe lying in the manger... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them" (Lk 2:16-18, 20). Just as at that midnight the shepherds glorified God at the birth of the Saviour, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to become worthy to sing everlasting glory to the Lord at His Second Coming.

3. Star in the East to Magi

"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? We have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him'" (Mt 2:1-2). Just as at that midnight the Magi worshipped the new born Saviour, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to become worthy to worship the Lord at His Second Coming from the east (Mt 24:27).

4. Flight to Egypt

"He rose and took the child and His mother by night, and departed to Egypt" (Mt 2:14). Just as at that midnight Joseph with Mary safeguarded the true God, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to get ready to safeguard the truth at any cost to meet the Lord face to face at any time.

5. Nicodemus' visit

"Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews...came to Jesus by night..." (Jn 3:1-2). Just as at that midnight Nicodemus was earnest in searching for the kingdom of God, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to become earnest in searching and establishing the kingdom of God in and around us.

6. Ten maidens

"At midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him'" (Mt 25: 6). Just as at that midnight the prepared maidens could meet the groom at his abrupt arrival, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to become ever ready to meet the Lord at any time.

7. *Praying alone*

"In these days He went out into the hill to pray; and all the night He continued in prayer to God" (Lk 6:12). Just as all the night Jesus prayed before choosing the twelve, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to obtain the readiness to know the will of God with earnest prayer before undertaking any task.

8. *Paul and Silas praying in Prison*

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened" (Acts 16:25-26). Just as at that midnight the earnest prayers and praising made Paul and Silas free from the prison, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to pray diligently for the liberation from all earthly bonds in life.

9. *Paul's raising of Eutychus to life*

"On the first day of the week, when gathered together to break the bread, Paul... prolonged his speech until midnight... And a young man named Eutychus sitting in the window... being overcome by sleep, fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him said, "Do not be alarmed, his life is in him: (Acts 20:7-10). Just as that midnight the earnestness in listening to the Word of God saved the man, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to pray for obtaining deep faith in the life giving Word of God.

10. *Miraculous saving from the tempest to Malta*

"Soon a tempestuous wind... struck down from the land; and when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven... At the fourteenth night, about midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land" (Acts 27:14-15, 27). Just as that midnight Paul strengthened the sailors to trust upon God for a miraculous saving from the tempest, so also through the midnight prayer we too have to obtain divine grace to trust in God for facing difficulties in life.

d. *Qala d-Sahra* (call of waking) – vigil

This is the prayer at the dawn of the day around 3 a.m., the fourth watch of night. The purpose is to keep vigil over temptations awakening the soul to discern the good and evil

Jesus in the early morning

1. *Jesus' agony, arrest, bringing to the high priest, and Peter's denial*

"Then they seized Him and led Him away, bringing Him into the high priest's house" (Lk 22:54); "I do not know what you mean...I do not know the man...I do not know the man. Immediately the cock crowed" (Mt 26: 70, 72, 74). Just as that dawn of the day Jesus' suffering taught Peter the necessity of keeping vigil over temptations, so also through the vigil service we too have to be convinced of the necessity of watchfulness of life in overcoming temptations.

2. Solitary prayer of Jesus

"In the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place and there He prayed" (Mk 1:35). Just as that dawn of the day Jesus prayed earnestly to the Father, so also through the vigil service we too have to pray earnestly to the Lord to acquire spiritual strength throughout the day.

3. Walking over the sea

"In the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea...But the disciples terrified, saying, 'It is a Ghost!' And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, 'Take heart, It is I; have no fear'. Then Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water'. He said, 'Come'. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid he cried out, 'Lord, save me'. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'O man of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (Mt 14:25-31). Just as that dawn of the day Jesus turned the apostles' fear of Ghost into the joy of Christ, so also through the vigil service we too have to approach the Lord to overcome the fear of Satan in obtaining the joy of the Lord.

4. Transfiguration

"Peter and those who were with Him were heavy with sleep, but kept awake and they saw His glory" (Lk 9:32). Just as that dawn of the day the apostles' vigilance helped them to see the glory of Jesus at His transfiguration, so also through the vigil service we too have to become worthy to enjoy the glory of God at His final glorious appearance.

5. Discourse after the last supper

"After receiving the morsel, immediately he went out; and it was night" (Jn 13:30). Just as that dawn of the day Judas' escape from the last discourse of Jesus made him an opponent, so also through the vigil service we too have to take precaution not to avoid God's counsel for the sake of personal motivations.

6. The apparition to Mary

"When He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene" (Mk 16:9), "On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared" (Lk 24:1). "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark" (Jn 20:1). Just as that dawn of the day Mary's vigil helped her to meet the Risen Lord face to face, so also through the vigil service we too have to obtain the alertness to enjoy the glory of Christ at His Second Coming.

7. Waiting for the master

"Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes" (Lk 12:37). Just as that dawn of the day the watchful servants became blessed, so also through the vigil service we too have to obtain the watchfulness in order to be blessed by the Lord at His abrupt Second Coming.

8. Peter's deliverance from prison

"Peter bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, and the sentries were guarding the prison before the door. Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared ... and struck Peter on the side and woke him ... and the angel said to him, 'follow me' ... (Acts

12:1-17). Just as that dawn of the day Peter even at the risk of life followed watchfully the angel, so also through the vigil service we too have to follow the guidance of the Lord at any risk.

9. *Paul's vision at Troas*

"... They went down to Troas; and a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us'... immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach Gospel to them" (Acts 16:8-10). Just as that dawn of the day Paul was ready to undertake the mission of the Lord, so also through the vigil service we too have to get ready to undertake the task of the Lord at any time.

2. *Hours*

a. *Sapra* (morning) – matins/lauds/prime

This is the prayer at 6 a.m., the first hour of the day. The purpose is to put trust in the Lord asking His protection during the day to walk in the light of the Lord. The day's strife and struggles demand courage and dedication to work for the glory of God and the good of the people.

Jesus in the morning

1. *Rising sun: the symbol of Christ*

"When the day shall dawn upon us from on high, He will give light to those who live in darkness and in shadow of death in order to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1:78-79). Just as the morning is the symbol of Christ's enlightenment to the people, so also

through the morning prayer we too have to be enlightened by the Lord to do good works to the people during the day.

2. *Jesus before Sanhedrin*

"When the day broke... they led Him away to their council" (Lk 22:66). Just as that morning Jesus faced courageously the trials of the day, so also through the morning prayer we too have to get ready to face the trials of the day in winning the race for the truth.

3. *Jesus before pilot*

"When morning came, the entire chief priest and the elders of the people took council against Jesus... and delivered Him to Pilot the governor... When He was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer" (Mt 27:1-2, 12). Just as that morning Jesus faced in silence the false testimonies against Him, so also through the morning prayer we too have to obtain patience in facing false accusations during the day.

4. *Apparition to Peter and other disciples*

"Just as the day was breaking, Jesus stood at the water's edge... He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some'. So they cast it, and they could not pull it back for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'..." (Jn 21:4-7). Just as that morning the miraculous catch of fish in obedience to the Word of Jesus increased the apostles' faith in the Lord, so also through the Morning Prayer we too have to get ready to fulfil the will of God in order to overcome the failures in life and deepen the experience of faith throughout the day.

b. Qutta (third hour) – terce

This is the prayer at 9 a.m., the third hour of the day. The purpose is to renew the good intentions of the day in keeping up the spirit of constant prayer throughout the day.

*Jesus at third hour***1. Crucifixion**

“It was the third hour when they crucified Him” (Mk 15:25). Since the crucifixion of Jesus at the third hour was the cruellest act of humanity ever done, we have to take precaution through the third hour prayer not to become the crucifiers of Christ through our words and deeds during the day.

2. Pentecost

“These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). Just as that third hour the apostles after the Pentecost burned with the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News of resurrection, so also through the third hour prayer we too have to get ready to become earnest in witnessing Christ to the world.

3. Jesus in Synagogue on Sabbath days

“He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and He went to synagogue, as His custom was, on the Sabbath day. And He stood up to read the scripture” (Lk 4:16); “On the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue (at Nazareth). Many people were there; and when they heard Him, they were all amazed” (Mk 6:2). Just as Jesus was courageous to preach the Word of God in synagogues, so also through the third hour prayer we too have to get ready to proclaim the Word of God without fear.

4. Paul in synagogue on Sabbath days

“On the Sabbath day they (Paul and Barnabas) went into the synagogue and sat down” (Acts 13:14); “He (Paul) argued in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). Just as Paul followed Jesus in preaching the Gospel in synagogues, so also through the third hour prayer we too have to get ready to fulfil the Christian duty of proclaiming the Word of God everywhere.

c. Eddana (sixth hour) – sext

This is the prayer at 12 in the noon, the sixth hour of the day. The purpose is to enkindle the fervour of the day. The midday, the peak time of sunlight, is the symbol of both the good and bad elements in life. The good elements like warmth and quietness of the midday signify compassion and peace; while the bad elements like fire and power of the midday signify passion and pride. We have to cherish the good elements of the noon time.

*Jesus at sixth hour***1. Meeting with Samaritan Woman**

“Tired by journey, Jesus sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’ (Jn 4:6-7). Just as that midday Jesus conquered the Samaritan woman, so also through the sixth hour prayer we too have to obtain the willingness to be conquered by Jesus in accordance to His wish.

2. Jesus on the Cross and darkness

“Sixth hour...when a darkness came over the whole land until the 9th hour, while the sun’s light failed” (Lk 23:44). Just as that

midday the nature closed its eyes, through the spreading of darkness, not to see the obscure scene of cruelty ever happened in history, so also through the sixth hour prayer we too have to obtain the readiness not to permit the evil power to permeate life.

3. *Peter's vision*

"... Peter went up on the house top to pray, about the sixth hour... And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance" (Acts 10:9-10). Just as that midday Peter's vision kept him in peace of mind and heart in preaching the Word of God to the gentiles as they too are clean before the Lord (Acts 10:15, 28-29), so also through the sixth hour prayer we too have to obtain the peace of mind and heart in doing good to others without any discrimination.

4. *Paul's conversion*

"As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a bright light from heaven suddenly shone round me and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ... And I said, 'what shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'" (Acts 22:6). Just as that midday the intervention of the Lord transformed Paul to work for salvation, so also through the sixth hour prayer we too have to obtain the willingness to permit the Lord to transform us to work for salvation.

d. *Batsa sayin* (ninth hour) – none

This is the prayer at 3 p.m., the ninth hour of the day. The purpose is to renew the spiritual enthusiasm up to the end of the day.

Jesus at ninth hour

1. *Death of Jesus*

"At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, '*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani*?' which means, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? ... Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last' (Mk 15:34-37). Just as that ninth hour of the day Jesus' call from the Cross to the Father manifested His complete trust in the divine providence, so also through the ninth hour prayer we too have to obtain the readiness to make complete trust in the Lord throughout the day.

2. *Peter's first miracle:*

"Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour ... At the gate of the temple... he (the lame man) asked for alms... But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk.' ... Leaping up he stood up and walked" (Acts 3:1-8). Just as that ninth hour of the day Peter's trust in the name of Jesus cured the lame man at the temple gate, so also through the ninth hour prayer we too have to obtain the willingness to find complete trust in the Lord to do wonderful things in life.

Conclusion

The sacredness of prayer time in the New Testament depends on its relation to the life style of Jesus. Jesus as a Jew had His Jewish background in this regard. The Jews calculated the day from evening to evening (Gen 1), and divided the whole day into eight parts – four night watches and four day hours, and prayed seven times a day (Ps 118:164). Their normal routine of seven-time prayer during the day

was set as the main two times (evening and morning) of sacrifices in the temple (Ex 29:38-41, 30:7-8; Num 28:3-8), three times (third, sixth, ninth hours) of prayer in synagogues (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10), and main two times (before and after night rest) of prayers at home (Deut 6:7; 11:19) with special midnight prayer (Ps 118:62). The Jewish Christians followed the same tradition in imitation of Jesus and the apostles (Mt 4:23; 12:9; 13:54; Mk 1:21; Lk 4:16; 24:53; Jn 18:20; Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12; 10:9; 12:5; 13:13-14; 16:13; 17:1-3; 18:4; 24:53). Accordingly the Christianity kept up the seven set times of prayers stressing the relevance of Jesus at those times.

The spiritual impact of Christ events on the set times of the liturgy of the hours enlightens the worshipper to feel himself one

with Christ in finding peace and joy in life, relaxing oneself with the Lord in overcoming the strife and struggle of the day to work for the glory of God and the good of the people. True worshipper is the one who thirsts for the cosmic salvation of the world, and works for the same through earnest prayers in offering everlasting glory, honour, praise, thanks, and adoration to Him who creates, protects, and saves those who put trust in Him. The liturgy of the hours achieves this purpose, because it is the daily continuous process of human effort to meet the Lord entering into His saving acts, and to restore everything in Christ (Eph 1:10) proclaiming His glorious hand works (Ps 18:1) in singing, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name, let there be glory forever" (Ps 115:1) throughout the day and night.

